

Linguistic Anthropology

For master's program

Linguistic Theory and Language Description

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1. Course description

a. Title of a Course

Linguistic anthropology is an interdisciplinary course for the students of the MA program *Linguistic theory and language description* (HSE University). The course has no prerequisites.

b. Pre-requisites

The course does not require any special background. It establishes some demands on students' skills in spoken and written English, and is aimed at those students who have acquired the level of English proficiency not lower than B2 in CEFR scheme. The course materials can be used in a course "Sociolinguistics".

c. Course Type

Compulsory

d. Abstract

The course covers variation of linguistic structures in cross-cultural perspective. The course considers language as a cultural resource and behavior. It provides a general overview of the empirical and methodological studies of linguistic categorization (e.g. the study of color terms, kinship terms, cardinal and relative directions, noun categorization); social functions of proper names and ethnography of naming; linguistic taboos; genderlects; ethnography of speaking; functions and structural properties of ritual languages; properties of traditional texts and storytelling; popular etymology and rites based on it, use of language as magical means; function of language as basis of mythological beliefs and plots.

The course surveys linguistic methods in anthropology: linguofolkloristics, ethnolinguistics etc. It introduces the students to the main methods of molecular anthropology in reconstructing the global history of human kind and local histories of language contact and shift. Some of the above aspects of the study of language are highly relevant for field research, on the theoretical level, to understand and document worldwide variation of linguistic functions and often, and on the practical level, to conduct linguistic research and carry out analysis of naturalistic discourse. It is not coincidental that the main provider of shareware software for field linguists, Summer Institute of Linguistics (www.sil.org) has recently included, in its range of products, a special utility to document kin systems and lineages.

2. Learning objectives

The objectives of the course are to introduce the students to the parameters of variation of linguistic categorization, to cross-cultural variation in speech practices and to the role of the language in traditional culture; as well as to the methods of study of this variation, including in field conditions.

3. Learning outcomes

Intended outcomes include, for the students:

- understanding the ways in which human language is important to (understand) traditional culture
- understanding principles of and approaches to cross-linguistic study of the culturally relevant aspects of language and linguistically relevant aspects of culture
- mastering the theoretical fundamentals and practical methodological skills related to this domain

4. Course plan.

The course covers a variety of topics in modern anthropological linguistics (alias linguistic anthropology), including:

Linguistic categorization: relativism vs. universalism.

Kinship terms: typology, methods of analysis and social meaning

Role of the language in traditional society

Practices of naming: typology and cultural significance

Ethnography of speech and story-telling

Language as magic, language and myth

Theories of politeness

Human molecular anthropology

5. Reading list

Required reading – does not require

The topic does not have established and commonly accessible textbooks and is fully based on presentations from the lecturers and discussion of case-studies in the classroom.

Optional reading

1. Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson. Politeness: some universals in language usage. CUP, 1978.
2. Beier, Christine, Lev Michael and Joel Sherzer. Discourse forms and processes in indigenous lowland South America: An Areal Typological perspective. Annual Review of Anthropology, 2002: 31.
3. Crawford, Michael (ed.) Anthropological genetics. Theory, method and applications. Cambridge, 2007.
4. Diamond, J. Guns, germs and steel. The fates of human societies. 1997.
5. Dunn. Michael. Gender determined dialect variation.
6. Duranti, Alessandro. Anthropological linguistics. Cambridge, 1997.
7. Everett, Daniel. Cultural constraints on grammar and cognition in Piraha. Another look at the design features of human language. Current anthropology, 46.
8. Foley, William. Linguistic anthropology. Blackwell, 1997.

6. Grading system

Grading system is based on a final exam (0,5) and current assignment and activity (0,5). The course is delivered in lectures and discussion classes.

7. Guidelines for Knowledge Assessment

Accumulated grade (Ga) for the student's work during the module(s) is the lecturer's assessment of the student's work during seminars (group discussions).

Examination grade (Ge) is the arithmetic mean of the grade for the mid-term presentation and the examination essay (case-study).

The final grade (Gf) is the arithmetic mean of the accumulated grade (Ga) and the examination grade (Ge):

$$Gf = 0.5Ga + 0.5Ge$$

The grades are rounded in favour of the student.

Table of Grade Accordance

Ten-point		
Grading Scale		

	Five-point Grading Scale	
1 - very bad 2 – bad 3 – no pass	no pass – 2	FAIL
4 – pass 5 – highly pass	pass – 3	PASS
6 – good 7 – very good	good – 4	
8 – almost excellent 9 – excellent 10 – perfect	excellent – 5	

During the re-examination, the student has no possibility of obtaining additional mark to raise the grade for current or mid-term assignments.

The resulting grade for the course counts towards the certificate of Master’s degree.

8. Methods of Instruction

The following educational technologies are used in the study process:

- group preparation of presentations;
- group discussion and analysis of the results of home reading;
- case studies.

9. Special Equipment and Software Support

The course requires a laptop, projector, and a whiteboard.